

RAMJI

BRITISH INDIA.

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RAMJI

a Tragedy of the Indian Woman

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XXVI. 2. XXIII

CHAPTER I

He had done it. Done what had been the cause of so much unpleasantness for many a day between himself and his wife. With a heavy step and heavier heart he turned homewards. In one hand he held the price of his bargain but that hand was thrust far behind as though the sight of the glittering coin lying within it were hateful to him. Every step that brought him nearer his hut increased the weight on his heart, while his countenance expressed the utmost misery. Never before had he felt thus when returning home after his day's work in the field. With his whip slung over his shoulder, he had

wended his way homeward; and had driven his cattle before him, talking the while to his two eldest sons or singing gaily to his bullocks. No trace of that gaiety however was visible in him to-day. His cheerfulness had left him, and with it had departed the strength and elasticity of his muscular frame. A mere skeleton he looked with his sunken cheeks, hollow eyes and body utterly devoid of flesh. His wife was in the same condition so were the bullocks. Ah, what a heartrending sight it was for him to be compelled day after day to see his two fine yoke of oxen, his cow and buffalo those valued creatures which had been the main support of his wife and family gradually get thinner and thinner. And then the unspeakable misery of knowing that he was utterly helpless. His cattle

especially his yoke of oxen have long been the envy of the village so

fat and sleek were they. His neighbours well knowing the pride he felt in his bullocks, would often have a little fun at his expense. The mere mention of selling his oxen was enough to put him into a violent passion, and when they came to him with offers of an advantageous sale, he would lose all self control and rant and shout, heaping the most violent abuse on their poor heads, and threatening to horsewhip any who dared to propose such a thing to him again. But all this had changed during the short space of a fortnight. If anybody now proposed to him that he should sell his oxen he took it quietly and reasonably. He himself had come to see the necessity of such a step, though the very thought of parting with his beloved Lalya and Palya, his Dhowla and Gowla made him shudder and turn cold. He had seen his neighbours selling their cattle

and abused them soundly for their selfishness and heartlessness

"Stint stint yourselves, you pitiless wretches " he had said " but do not send your oxen to the bazaar. I would rather fill my stomach with thorns and brambles than sell *mine* to feed myself ' But now he was silent The same calamity had befallen him It was only a week ago that his cow had laid herself down at his feet and died through sheer starvation. Oh, the agony of that moment Strong man though he was, he had wept like a child He had loved the creature, as though she had been his own mother. Nay more. His grief for his dead mother had been neither so poignant nor so lasting If the cow had died of anything but starvation, he could have borne it but to have seen her getting weaker and thinner day by day to have seen her raise her eyes

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pitcously to him, as if to ask for the sustenance which he was powerless to give, was something which caused him the most intense suffering. Seeing her scarcely able to support herself on her legs, he had rushed out one day to return with a tiny little bundle of kadba. The six dumb creatures stood up on his entrance and looked at the bundle longingly, though with lustreless eyes. Soni (the cow), too, had followed their example though with an effort. Ramji had held up the sheaf to her mouth first. One of his sons a boy hardly four years of age, had taken two stalks from the bundle and put them between her teeth; but she had refused to bite the grass and turned away her head with a gentle sigh. Finding she would not touch it, Ramji had bent forward, and passing his hands caressingly over her neck had spoken to her as if tempting her to eat. "Chew

this chew this my darling mother. Do not leave me so soon. We shall see better days yet." But alas! with one long piteous cry the cow had raised her head and thrown up her tail in the air, her tongue had protruded and she had fallen down dead. The boy had run in to tell the sad news to his mother, who had rushed out half frantic with grief. The whole family summoned thither by her heartrending cries, had wept and lamented over the death of their old cow just as if she had been a breadwinner of the household. Since that day, the day on which he had lost his Soni, Ramji had become a changed man restless and melancholy. He had at last come to realise the sad fact that he must either see his animals die one by one, or give them away to those who would be able to tend them and feed them. So, one day, he went and asked the Patel the

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Kulkarni the Inamdar, in fact, every well-to-do man in the village to take his cattle for pity's sake if nothing else. But who, during such hard times, would accept other people's animals when they had their own to look after? They all refused. When people saw him going from door to door with his animals, some laughed at him and taunted him with "Oh, ho Ramji, here you are. Where is your pride now? Gone off like your cattle, eh?" Some insulted him with the suggestion that instead of being given away they might be sold with advantage to the butcher. 'Do, man,' they would say, 'do go to the butcher, he will give you at least four or five rupees for them.' Ramji's feelings at these words can better be imagined than described. He turned back determined he would never sell them. He would tie them in the shed and see them die rather than

let them fall into the hands of the butcher.

Arrived home he tied up the animals, then threw himself down in a corner. He could not make up his mind to face his wife. He had no heart. What would she say? What answer would he make her? But the truth had to be told, and he told it. Two more days passed. To the anxiety about the animals was now added the anxiety about the children, about his wife and himself.

There was hardly any grain left in the earthen pot. One course alone was open to him. He must go to the bazaar on the next market day, and sell off his bullocks and buffalo for what they would fetch. When he had wished to give them away, nobody in his village would accept them. He had, however, given up the idea of giving them away. He must do what others had done if he

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He did not wish to see his children die of starvation. He had no thought for himself. He could support himself somehow, but what about his dear wife and children? How could he earn enough to maintain them? Their scanty stock of bajri would run out in three or four days. What would they do then? They had already starved themselves during the last fortnight so that it might last the children a few days longer.

Gloomy indeed was the prospect that lay before him! When he had found it impossible to get sufficient fodder for his animals, he had thought of giving them away, but now he determined to see if he could not get something by selling them. The thought of bartering his beloved bullocks for a few repees was at first very distasteful to him, but the sight of his emaciated children, of his wife being troubled nay tortured by the

baby for milk made him entertain it again and again.

Finally one night he mooted the idea to his wife, but the mere mention of it enraged the otherwise gentle woman. What did her husband mean? She could not understand him, and strongly reproved him for allowing such a cruel thought to come into his mind. Sell their beloved bullocks to buy corn? Why the idea was preposterous! As well think of selling their own children. She would not hear of it. In despair the poor man put off the carrying out of the disagreeable plan. But how long could things go on as they were? Every passing hour reminded him that, disagreeable as it was, the plan must be carried out. The oxen had lost all their beauty, and were hourly getting thinner and more emaciated. What if they followed the cow? was a question Ramji was often forced to ask himself.

Two days had passed since he had spoken to his wife about selling their oxen ; and during that time Jayabai had come to see how helpless they really were . The bajri in the dera (an earthen pot) was almost finished and could not possibly last more than two days even if they lived on half rations. Involuntarily her thoughts would revert to the proposal made by her husband. She would put the idea from her mind with a shudder, but it would come again and again. As if to convince herself that their situation was not really so bad as they feared she would go to the cattle shed and have a look at the oxen then gather a handful of dry grass growing on a neighbouring wall and bring it to them . When they ate it she would look pleased and seemed to think that that was quite sufficient for the bullocks for one day and that she had done something

towards putting off the evil hour.
But how long could such self-deception continue?

Another day passed and in the night Ranji again broached the subject that was occupying both his own and his wife's thoughts. He found that the ardour of her protest had considerably cooled. She hesitated at first, but finally yielded. In consenting, however, she insisted that the cattle must on no account be sold to a butcher.

No sleep visited the eyes of the husband and wife that night. One moment, they would be in perfect accord about the sale, the next, one or other of them would raise some objection and change all previous plans. With a sob which she could hardly suppress the wife would whisper to her husband, 'Ah I rather see them die in their shed before my own eyes than let them

—

fall into the hands of the butcher.' And he would quiet her with the assurance that to the slaughter house they should never go. He would not sell them to a butcher, but how could he say for certain that ultimately they would not fall into his hands. Thus the night passed and every minute brought the hour nearer when she must part with her beloved cattle, Jayabai became very restless. Fortunately, the children were still asleep. Ranji did not wish them to know anything yet the two bigger boys were old enough to understand their father's action, and he was aware that their sorrow would know no bounds, if they found that their beloved Lalya and Palya, Gowlia and Dhowlia were going away never to return. Soon, however, his wife's strange behaviour turned his thoughts away from the children. Though she had given her

consent, yet now that the momou had arrived, she felt that she would sooner part with one of her children. But the climax came when she saw her husband turn his steps towards the cattle shed. Half brainwashed with grief she gave a piercing scream. 'Never! never,' cried she "will not see my darling bullocks led to the bazaar. And with that she threw herself down before the oxen. That poor husband stood aghast. He knew not how to console her. His own grief had been great enough before, but now his wife's sorrow had increased it tenfold. Slowly he untied the bullocks one by one, comforting his wife as he did so. He succeeded at last in soothing her, but her heart was still very sorrowful. "Husband dear," she entreated sorrowfully, "let me at least feed them each with a handful of barley for the last time, and then you may then

‘Give them away’ Five handfuls
Bhaji knew, was not a small quantity,
he could not refuse his wife’s
request. He felt that to say ‘no’
other than, would be nothing short
of cruelty, it would be kinder to deal
him a blow on the head. He there-
fore said nothing. He would buy
grain with the money he would get.
His wife taking his silence for
consent, wiped her eyes and went
to the hut. Their stock of bajri
would not last for more than two
days; but, nothing deterred she
measured out five handfuls, put them
in her ocha (apron) and went back
to the shed. It was nearly sunrise
when Jayabai, as she stood before
her cattle, was the picture of misery.
Grief and want of sleep had
made her look ghastly. With the
tears streaming down her pale cheeks,
and with sobs which she could
hardly suppress she held the baiji

before one after another. Oh the avidity with which they ate. Jayabai's sobs began rising, and by a time the last grain was eaten, she had completely lost all control of herself. Throwing her arms round the neck of one of the bullocks, she called loudly to her children, lamenting piteously as she did so. Thinking it would be best to take the animals away as soon as possible, Ramji tried to remove his wife's arm gently from the bullock's neck. But Jayabai, who had lost all power of reason in her thought, turned round on her husband and said, "O husband, why are you makes you so cruel? Why are you in such a hurry to take them away? They seem to have become an sore to you. Do you wish to take them to the butcher to buy food for us? If that is your only reason, why not sell one of the children?" She could not say anything more, for a sob choked her voice.

The children, roused by their mother's loud lamentations, had now gathered round her. On learning the cause of her grief, they too began to weep, and putting their arms round the neck of the oxen joined her in entreating their father not to take them away. Their tears and grief almost turned Ramji from his resolve, and he felt inclined to defer the evil hour. But again the thought of leaving so many mouths to feed showed him that he must be firm; and brushing away the tears from his eyes, he spoke loving words of comfort to his wife and children. Then tying the animals, he led them away without once looking back. He seemed hardly conscious of the fact that he was walking his way led by the edge of his field. He looked at the stalks which the drought had parched and heaved a deep sigh. "Oh, what a miserable plight I am in," he thought

to himself and sadly wondered what fate had in store for him. He again looked at the field and the tears came into his eyes. He was thinking perhaps of the happy days that were no more. With head bent he walked on, too miserable to cheer his bullock by his singing, as was his wont. Besides, their sufferings now were too intense to be softened by mere singing. He met several peasants bound on the same errand as himself, but felt too much ashamed to talk to them, and was he not doing the very thing he had condemned in them? He walked on in silence, meditating on what he should get for his bullocks—certainly nothing less than twenty or twenty-five rupees! But what was his astonishment when he reached the bazaar and found more than five hundred bullocks standing in the market-place and selling at three or four annas a head. Was it a dream? Surely;

his eyes and ears were deceiving him. It was some time before he could realise that all he saw and heard was no dream but stern reality. He resolved that his cattle at least should not be sold for such paltry prices. But then a question arose, "What was he to do with them?" He could not drive them back eight miles hungry as they were without giving them a stalk of kharba. They would drop down dead on the way. He felt sure none of them would reach their shed at home alive. After thinking over the matter for some four hours, he came to the conclusion that there was no alternative but to sell them. It was the lesser evil. Yes, they must be sold. But do you know the full significance of these words? That a peasant, who breeds and tends his cattle with greater care even than which he bestows on himself and his children should be compelled to

sell them at three or four annas a head. Alas! what can be more disastrous to a country than that agricultural classes, who, as in India form the bulk of the population, should, at the first pinch of famine be obliged to part with the means of their livelihood at such miserable prices. Men living in a city can hardly realise the gravity of such a misfortune.

Silently Ramji drove his cattle to where a man was tying them in little numbers; but when he got there he could not say a word, though his eyes eloquently expressed what his tongue refused to utter. "Why have you brought these miserable creatures here?" demanded the man. "Drive them away, fellow, back to your hut, cut them up, and share your flesh, if there be any, with your good woman." These cruel words pierced Ramji's heart like a silver arrow. An indignant retort followed.

his lips, but he checked it and
an driving his cattle in the direc
of the next buyer. The merchant
ever, called him back, "Well,
' said he with a jeer, "since you
brought the animals to me, I
do you the kindness to buy
Well what do you say to
ing them, or rather what is left of
an. for a quarter of a rupee?"
Ramji stared at the man in dumb
rise. He was convinced that such
insulting offer could come from
but a butcher, and turned his
back. But the merchant was
to be put off so easily. He asked
Ramji if he would accept six annas
his animals, and went on increasing
offer by two annas until he came
rupee. Ramji however had
made up his mind not to sell
to the man and continued on his
without taking any notice of him
what he was saying. But the

butcher ran up to him and forcing a
 rupee into his hand, tried to take
 possession of the cattle. This was
 more than Ramji could bear. Raising
 his arm he would have knocked the
 fellow down with a heavy blow, if
 not the bystanders interfered and
 separated them. But now the ques-
 tion arose. What was he to do with
 his cattle? Sell them of course,
 to whom? He stood waiting for a
 long time, before another buyer pre-
 sented himself. The man offered to
 buy the animals for a rupee an
 quarter, and in sheer despair Ramji
 closed with the offer, his only feeling
 being not of sorrow, but rather of
 gratification that his dear Lalya,
 Palya, and Dhowla and Gopal
 had not fallen into the hands of
 a butcher. Yes he was glad that
 had he not fulfilled his promise to his
 wife? Long and silent carcases did
 bestow on the dumb creatures

He was no longer his, for did he not hold their price in his hand? Taking leave of his oxen was far harder than he had thought. He took the head of the ox and laid it sorrowfully on his lap.

He did not derive much comfort from the rupee and a quarter that had come into his possession. He opened his hand and looked at the money. The money with which he was going to purchase corn, but the sight of the silver coin made his blood run cold and his hair stand on end. Was he selling to barter the price of the animals who had supported him and his family, for a few seers of bajri? The thought was abhorrent to him and it left him sad and gloomy, so that though dry though he was, he could not swallow the dry piece of bajri bread his wife had given him for his mid day meal. It seemed to choke him; and he gave up the attempt in despair.

And now buy grain he must not for himself at least for his children. With this determination he gave away the rupee and purchased a s and a half (three lbs) of bajri for annas. After this he seemed to grow a little calmer; but could not resist the temptation of taking a last look at the bullocks. He looked in every direction, but nowhere could he see the merchant. The herd bought by the heartless butcher had also disappeared. Sorely disappointed that he had not been able to have one glimpse of his animals, he slung his bundle of bajri over his shoulder and turned his steps homewards. When he had gone a hundred yards or so he saw in the distance the large cart belonging to the butcher. He overtook it, and was congratulating himself that his bullocks at least were not among the number when he felt a hand reb against his arm. He turned

and, and to his astonishment saw
down Lalya. Feeling sure that his
cattle must be in the herd,
examined it carefully and found
worst fears realised. They were
here. Poor fellow. He was now
devoid of the only consolation he
had viz., that his bullocks had not
fallen into the butcher's hands.

The rupee tied to the end of the
string which he had wound round his
head as a turban, seemed to burn into
his skin, while the bajri he was carrying
seemed steeped in blood. The
thought of his oxen. He would have
liked to throttle the butcher and
the man who had so grossly deceived
him. But being powerless to do this,
he vent to his feelings by roundly
beating him.

The man, however, was not slow to
reply. From words they came to
blows and in the scuffle which fol-
lowed, the knot of the bundle Ranji

had on his shoulder came under the bajr and all the bajr fell out and in a short time was consumed by the animals. Ramji was now thoroughly wretched. He had come off badly in the struggle and lost his grain into the bargain. He felt that he were returning home from the funeral of some beloved member of his family. What would his wife do when he told her that the butcher after all got their cattle, that the annas bajri had been wasted, that after selling the life and blood of the oxen, he had brought home a paltry rupee. He wished he had disposed of himself in the way he had done with the cattle.

The nearer he came to his home the more gloomy he became. Every step was now an effort. Weakly dragged himself on, and finally reached his hut. Arrived at the door, he did not make up his mind to enter.

His wife was still sobbing inside so
going away he walked round the
place several times. He looked at
the stall, it was empty. And yet he
tried to see the eyes of his cow
as they had appeared in death,
looking at him from the dark corner
of the shed and asking him where
Lalya was. Lalya, it should be
mentioned was her calf. He felt like
a wretch who takes the life of a
creature through love of gold
when he is seized with remorse. He
knew he was wrong, he thought in selling
his little to the Butcher, for no other
reason than to fill the empty stomachs
of his wife and children. Better would
it have been had they tied their necks
to the horns of their beloved animals and
died all together, but this agony
was intolerable.

CHAPTER II

JAYABAI'S grief since the departure of the animals had known no bounds. She had been like one whom a sudden calamity had deprived of five children. The agony she experienced each time she looked at the empty cattle shed had found expression in piercing shrieks. Towards afternoon however, she had become somewhat calmer, but as evening advanced her grief broke out again as she imagined to herself her husband returning home alone.

Soon the shades of night began to fall, and yet her husband had not returned. Sorrow and anxiety made her very restless. She

He went a dozen times to the door to see if there were any signs of his husband. How was she to know that at that time the boy went to the door to see his husband, who had already come. He drew back fearful of being seen. He dreaded the interview with his wife. Soon Jayabai's grief got the better of her grief, bidding Pirya sit at the door, and she stepped out, meaning to go to meet her husband. But she had not taken more than a step, when she stopped and drew back. Who was that man that was standing there and looking at her? He looked some other way. He looked some other way, the husband. Could it be that man? It was he but so changed that they scarcely recognise him. There was a strange look in them, a little had assumed a very dark look. Their eyes met, but he stood like a corpse immovable. The next moment Jayabai was convinced that

it was her husband and none whom she saw, she exclaimed, you have sold the cattle bought them? To whom did you sell them? She had asked questions he had been most evading. He could not answer. His lips refused to frame the reply. It was very dark by this time or Jayabai seeing her husband's face which had now become darker than ever would have thought he had transformed into a ghost. If he did not answer, she went up to him and laying her hand on his shoulder inquired why did he not speak. The animal is sold into good hands,' she uttered, 'are they not so? So long as he is a butcher, it does not matter who has them. But a butcher who kills them, has he?' she asked. If I had the question not been asked in such soft tones, Ramji might

But he suffered roughly, as it was, he was unable to speak. His wife got her message not in words but in a way far more expressive than mere words. Only a burning tear fell on her forehead and told her what her husband's mind refused to utter. The knowledge seemed to stun her. She stood motionless for a moment, then fell senseless. Poor Ramji rushed forward like a madman and returned with some water which he splashed on her face, but all in vain, he could not bring her to. It was fortunate that the children except Pirya had gone to school, otherwise what with their tears and the confusion would have been a terrible sight indeed. For there were eight of them in all, and Pirya aged twelve was the eldest, the youngest was the baby girl eleven months old. From what has been related, some imagination will be needed on the part of the reader to picture

to himself the real circumstance of
 Ramji and his family. Every day
 had been sold that could be so. A
 miserable mattress and two or three
 torn old blankets now constituted
 their wealth. With the sari which
 Jayabai, and the strip of cloth which
 Ramji had round his loins, and
 another which he had wound round
 his head, the list of their possessions
 would be complete.

Carrying his wife into the house,
 Ramji laid her on the floor, and
 dark, and tried to restore her
 consciousness by sprinkling water on
 her face. For days the poor woman
 scarcely knew what it was, and
 a good meal, and now the poor
 Ramji was filled with despair. When
 he found that all his efforts to give
 animation were in vain, and that
 an unlooked-for calamity had befallen
 no wonder that the poor man
 came thoroughly miserable.

life. he, too, had been half
for several weeks, while that
had not tasted even a morsel
of food. I will light the lamp,
he; but alas, he remembered
there was neither oil nor match
in the hut while the lamp had
been the way of all their other
things. He thought of going
to borrow one from a neighbour
but he had no neighbours now all,
gone hundreds of miles from
home. There was the Kulkarni
Patel and the Jahagirdar in
the village, but they were a heartless

man who knew them too well to
offer any help from them. Even
the village elders were less pitiless. That
on his own experience and
knowledge of all his neighbours.
Faced with difficulties on every
side, he threw himself down, and sat
in silence over his fate.

What to do next,' was the question which now occupied his thoughts. He could have shifted for some-
 somehow, but how was he to provide for the seven children? He never thought of his wife, he left all of his calculations altogether. He felt sure she was dead and, in his present state of mind, he was not glad to have it so; for what sorrow and misery would she not be suffering. But no, Jayabai was not so foolish. She gradually came to her senses and began to feel about her little baby. Then she called for Pirya and asked him whether her father had not yet returned. He seemed oblivious of all that had happened since he left home in the morning. But Ramji's sigh of relief and his exclamation of joy on finding that his wife was still alive brought everything back to his memory. 'You have sold our bullockable'

our buffaloes to the butcher after all, have you not? she asked, in a voice which shook with strong feeling 'Oh, my dear husband, how could you stretch your hand to take the money, the price of our own cattle? And how much did you get? But why do I ask? I will not touch a grain bought with that money I would rather starve myself and my children to death than eat the corn purchased with that cursed money Do what you like with that wretched coin Our bullocks our cattle were they not as dear to us as our own children? And yet you had the heart to sell them and to a butcher? And for what? To satisfy the pangs of hunger? She went on in this strain for some time, and all Ramji's efforts to make her listen to reason were of no avail. In vain did he tell her how he had been deceived and how little he was to blame The

poor woman's misery was too ^{much} to permit her to think 'reason'. She insisted on his throwing ^{long as} the money — "the price of ^{to} darling bullocks' blood." "I ^{to} night, will not let you buy anything ^{firmly,} it," said she. "If it comes ^{and} the worst, we will tie all our necks ^{only} together and strangle ourselves and children; but eat bread bought with that money—never! Fling—fling away the wretched coin: we don't want it in the house." And overcome with the exertion of talking, Jayabai sank down on the floor quite exhausted, while the little baby whom she had pressed to her bosom rolled on to the ground by her side. A feeling of drowsiness, or more properly, merciful sleep, soon came over her and she forgot her troubles for a while at least.

Ranji spent the whole night in going in and out of his hut. Every

our bi
When he went out, his eyes would remain voluntarily to the stables, and to look at a pang he would turn round go the other way of his hut. No night spent to earn could have occasioned him and if mental agony than did that it to. He longed for the hour when the sun would shine, and watched impatiently for the first bright streaks of dawn. The light of day, he thought, would bring light to his soul. How fervently he prayed for light, and God seemed so merciful to him when the east began to glow. A few minutes more, and the sun appeared above the horizon and peeped into the hut as if to inquire how they were. That family of nine souls woke up only to think of the cares and anxieties that awaited them that day. Jayabai raised herself with difficulty and managed to stand up somehow. Her legs had become so weak that they could scarcely support



her frame, enfeebled though it ^{had} been. Her mind however, was as strong as ever and well able to support any determination. She recalled their all that happened the previous day and said faintly, though very ^{firmly} with "Husband, by my blood, and the blood of these our children, I solemnly to enjoin you buy no grain—buy nothing with that money, throw it away throw away that accursed coin into the river or into the sewer. Don't let us have it in our house. Let us not soil our hands by touching it. Take Pirya with you and go and look for work somewhere. He will be of some use to you. You need not be anxious about me. I will do anything everything that my hands can find to do and get bread for myself and these little ones of mine. Go do not hesitate. Time is too precious to be thus idled away. Pirya will go with you so will Hirya."

our ~~but~~ now quite old enough to do
~~me~~ it his mother. The others will
turn in hind with me. I am well able
then ~~wi~~ter them. The sooner you
and enter, You three will be able
in hellough to support yourselves
greater here is anything over send
night, if not, try to forget me.
the ~~Q~~ made her husband throw
~~in~~ the rupee into the drain and
gave him no rest all that day until
she had wrung from him an unwilling
consent to her proposal. The truth
was, the course she had suggested
was the only one open to them.

It was impossible for them all to go
to one place. If they wished to
maintain themselves they must sepa-
rate. 'If God wills it,' said she,
"He will unite us again; but let us
separate now and go different ways,
for in that alone lies our salvation.
Jayabai was a very wise woman. She
saw that if the whole family accom-

panied her husband, the few pice he might earn, would go to feed the ~~little~~ hungry mouths, and he himself would die of starvation. Horrible starvation that rack which slowly tears the limbs of its agonised victims, gradually sapping away every particle of strength until the enfeebled frame gives up its breath. And then if the support of the family were gone, what would they do? No, separate they must. Jayabai assured her husband that she would not quit the homestead unless compelled to do so by necessity. And Ramji, finding he could not move his wife from her resolve gave in. It was decided that he should take the two elder boys with him while the five younger ones were to stay behind with their mother.

It was only when the moment of parting arrived that Jayabai fully realised the difficulty of the task she had set herself. The poor woman

had determined that she would be brave when the hour for taking leave arrived, but what use. The tears she would have given worlds to keep back, flowed freely as she fell on the neck of her husband and bade good bye to her two boys. She went with them as far as she could. Then when she could no longer follow them with her feet, she followed them with her eyes until they were out of sight. She then turned back towards her cottage. Poor Jayabai! When the cattle were sold she had mourned for them as if they had been her own children. What then must her grief have been now, when her husband and her two eldest boys had gone from her, never to return, perhaps.

Ramji trudged on moodily without heeding Hirya's piteous cries to be taken back to his mother. Pirya who was thirteen, and understood something of his parents' difficulties com-

forted his younger brother as best he could ; and the two boys soon forgot their sorrow for a time at least.

Ramji had left home very reluctantly, and now his mind was consumed with anxiety as to what would become of his wife and how she would manage to feed herself and the five children. To this was added the anxiety he felt for Hirya and Pirya. Where could he get work ? In some town perhaps, but even there the chances were very small. The nearest town was about fifty or sixty miles away, how was he to reach it ? And how was he to support himself and his boys until he got there ? He had not even a cowry with him. When they had gone about seven or eight miles, little Hirya began to cry, saying he was too tired to walk any further, and the father was compelled to take him on his shoulder and carry him about two miles until the village was

reached where he proposed to halt for the night. The two boys now began to feel the pangs of hunger and Hirya's demands for food, which had grown louder and louder as they reached the village, became quite clamorous when he espied a bhadbhunja's (parched-grain seller) shop. The wretched father sat down by the roadside and tried to think out the question, "How was he to satisfy the boys' hunger?" He had not a pie by him, neither did he own anything that could be sold. A rag for the head and a rag for the waist were all that he possessed. And both together would not bring more than a couple of pice. Should he beg? He turned away from the thought as if it had been poison. He had never known what it was to beg—was he to learn the distasteful lesson now? And even if he did beg, who would respond to his appeal for help? He was roused from these thoughts by

Ilirya's cry that he was very very hungry. He lifted up his bowed head and looked round him and for the first time he noticed that Pirya was not there. "Where could the boy have gone?" thought the anxious father; "was he always to have trouble upon trouble?" Just then he saw Pirya coming with something in his hand. It was food. Ramji looked at the food and then at the boy's face. Was it possible that despair had driven his honest Pirya to steal? But his fears were soon allayed by his son who told him that he had begged the food from some people living close by. The father looked relieved. After Ilirya had satisfied his hunger, Pirya partook of the crumbs that remained. Ramji gave no thought to his own wants. When the boys had finished eating the three repaired to Maruti's temple hard by, where Ramji took off the rag which was wound round his

head, and spread it in the courtyard for the boys to sleep on. They journeyed thus from village to village eating when they were fortunate to get a little food, and sleeping in the temples. On the eighth day they entered a town at about eight o'clock in the morning, looking more like skeletons than living beings, so emaciated had they become from want of food and the exertion of walking. Oh, if only he could earn an anna or six pice, thought Ranji, to buy bajji for a little bread. Hope was strong in his breast. He went from house to house asking for work, but no work would anybody give him. On the contrary, people turned him away heartlessly from their doors. Some women however from one or two houses took pity on the hungry children, and gave him some food for them. For full two hours he wandered about in search of work, but

without success. At last a passer by, more humane than any he had yet encountered, took pity on him and threw him a two anna piece, saying "Here, my good fellow, take this and get something to eat before you again stir out in quest of employment." Ramji's joy could not have been greater if he had received two thousand rupees instead of two annas. He started at once to buy food, but being ignorant of the town, it was almost mid day before he reached the bazaar. Arrived at the market, he looked about him utterly bewildered by the sight of the grain shops, and the vegetable shops, and the fruit shops. What should he buy? Something of which he could get a larger quantity than anything else. He had hardly come to any decision when sounds of a tumult were heard behind him and cries of "They have come! They have come! Fly! Fly!" resounded

on all sides^f He had just time enough to pull his boys to one side of the road and then five or six hundred famished wretches like himself rushed down the street and began looting the grain shops. Before he could take in the situation, gunny bag after gunny bag full of corn was flung into the street and there emptied of its contents, while those who were standing in the street helped themselves to as much of the grain as they could carry and ran away. Ramji came of a good Maharatta family. Famishing though he was, he would not demean himself to take part in the loot. He would get away safely into a corner until the whole thing was over. With this intention, he turned round, but what was his consternation when he found that his little Piryā was nowhere to be seen. He looked this way and that; but no signs of the boy could he see. Taking hold of Piryā's hand

tightly, he pushed his way through that mad crowd of hungry human wretches, in search of his younger boy.

The police had not yet arrived on the scene. The loot was still going on, but now it was not restricted to the grain shops alone. The looters entered every shop, devoured whatever eatables came to their hands, took away whatever they thought would be useful to them and threw away the rest. The work of destruction went on for a long time. The people taking part in it were not the poor famished villagers; but city and village badmashes, whose rapacity knew no bounds. These men left no shop unentered, no article untouched. The really famished had scarcely strength to gather a scer of the grain thrown down by the wanton spoilers and fly for their lives. "It will never do for me to stay in this place. There

is no knowing what calamity may befall me, thought Ramji, but his love for his son would not let him leave the bazaar. With Pirya's hand firmly in his, he wandered hither and thither in the crowd in search of his lost Hirya, but all in vain. Nowhere was the boy to be seen. He forgot all his hunger and thirst in his new misfortune. He seemed to hear his wife's agonised voice asking him where Hirya was. And this frightened him so much, that he rushed about like one mad in search of the boy. Suddenly a terrible thought flashed across his mind. Had the boy been trampled to death in that wild rush? Yes, such a thing was possible, nay probable. The longer he dwelt upon this thought the stronger grew his conviction that his surmise was correct, and that his boy was dead. He was quite unnerved, his legs began to shake under him, his head swam and

he leaned against the plank of a shop door which had been broken a moment before by the looters. Suddenly a shout of "Sowars. Sowars." was raised, and the freebooters were seen flying in all directions. Ramji ought to have followed their example, but his mind had been totally unhinged by the events of the day, and he stood there like one dazed. People hurried past him pushing and jostling him in the hurry, but he heeded them not. One poor beggar took pity on him, and laying his hand on his shoulder said, 'Run, my dear fellow run for your life. Run if you don't wish to fall into the clutches of the police.' But Ramji neither moved nor spoke. "Die then," said the beggar, and fled down the street, leaving the two to their fate. One policeman pushed Ramji, another kicked him, a third gave Pirya a slap on the back, while all heaped the most filthy abuse on

their poor heads. The two were then made prisoners and their hands were tied with a rope. The police arrested all on whom they could lay hands. The weak and hungry looking—those who could scarcely crawl about—were made prisoners. In this way the real culprits, able-bodied bukmashes, got off scot free. Everybody that could be caught was a thief. When about a score or so of arrests had been made, the authorities thought they had done their duty, and placing a party of policemen in the bazaar to inspire confidence in the minds of the shopkeepers, they went their way. Ramji and his fellow sufferers, under the escort of the police, had hardly reached the chowky, when a report reached them that a little boy had been found dead in the crowd. Imagine what the poor father's feelings must have been when he heard the fearful tidings! He had no doubt now that the dead

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boy was his lost son. His Hirya, seized with a longing to see his child, whether dead or alive, he rushed up to the man who had brought the news, exclaiming piteously, "Oh where is the boy? He is my son. Take me to him." But here a cruel poke from the butt end of the havaladar's gun knocked him down, and he fell heavily forward in a dead faint. Poor Pirya looked on in dumb anguish at his father, then a feeling of dizziness came over him, and he too sank down beside the prostrate form of his father, apparently lifeless. The want of food and the weariness they had experienced during the seven days of their journey had done their work. When Ramji came to himself, the sight of his son stretched full length on the ground beside him caused the intensest suffering. He was not allowed to see Hirya's dead body. Some brutal policeman made merry at his expense

by giving ghastly descriptions, and when the wretched father's tears began to fall and he broke out in loud lamentations, they laughed at him calling him the murderer of his own son. Their abuse and their scoffs excited his rage, but he knew his wrath was impotent and that he was completely at their mercy.

He and his boy passed that night in the chowky, with the bare floor for their bed. They had nothing to cover themselves with, for the rag which had served him for a mundasa (head dress) was gone. It had been knocked off in the crowded bazaar otherwise it would have served Pirya for a covering. No sleep visited Ramji's weary eyelids, and when morning dawned it brought no hope with it. It struck ten, and yet he and his son had eaten nothing. Instead of food, the police sepoy's on guard gave the prisoners taunts and insults only. So weak had

Pirya become, that he could not rise from the place where he lay, and Ramji looking at him felt that it would not be long before his second son too breathed his last. Would none of the policemen there present take pity on his starving child and give him a piece of bread? No, the police, whether officers or men are known to be thoroughly heartless. Pity is alien to their nature. There would be more chance of the devil and his myrmidons being moved to pity than that one of these guardians of the peace should show mercy. One suggested that Ramji should feed the boy with the grain he had plundered the day before, and asked him why he did not do so. "Throw that boy into the fire," exclaimed another, who was regarded as a wit by his companions. "Why the devil did you marry his mother if you cannot feed him?" And then he laughed uproariously at his own wit.

the others joining him Ramji hung down his head in silence. When was this torture to end?

It was ten o'clock, and *these* had mashes who, according to the police, had been taken in the very act of looting, were taken before the Magistrate to be tried. The first case to come up before the Magistrate was theirs. The Magistrate, of course wished to make an example and uphold the prestige of the just and noble British Raj. The hapless wretches were all dragged into court where the farce of an inquiry was enacted. Witness after witness ten, twenty, thirty came forward and declared on oath that the prisoners before the Magistrate had been caught red handed that they had not only plundered grain, but everything they could lay their hands on and a great deal more in the same strain. Even circumstantial evidence

was not wanted. Bags upon bags of corn which, it was declared were found in their possession, were brought before the court. In vain did the prisoners assert their innocence; in vain did they declare that they had not touched a single grain of the corn. They were all found guilty, and the Magistrate at once proceeded to pronounce sentence against them. They were not to be sent to jail. Oh, no. That would have been an act of mercy, because they would at least get their food there. They were to be whipped, and Ramji was to receive fifty stripes for his audacity in protesting against the false evidence of the police demi gods, or rather demi devils. Pirya was to receive ten stripes and the rest twenty-five each. Can you conceive it, reader, that a Magistrate whose work it is to mete out justice should be guilty of such an inhuman act as

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to whip starving men who were scarcely able to stand? He might at least have had pity on the thirteen-year old boy. No time was to be lost. No justice did not brook delay. Besides, was there not that most potent reason of all why the sentences should be immediately carried out? An example must be made of these fellows to inspire awe and fear into the minds of the famine stricken subjects of her Imperial Majesty. It was the Magistrate's order that the men should be whipped publicly in the bazaar chowk (square), and the town crier was told to go and proclaim the event to the whole town.

When the god Yama issues his orders they are never questioned. His myrmidons waste not a moment in carrying them out. In this case his myrmidons, in the shape of the policemen, observed the greatest despatch. In half an hour everything

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was ready. The first victim to be bound was Pirya. Ramji could not look on quietly and see his innocent boy flogged. All his father's love awoke within him. He rushed towards the Mamlatdar, and falling at his feet, with folded hands entreated him to spare his boy. "Rao sahib he exclaimed, 'we are innocent—quite innocent. We have done nothing to deserve this punishment. Why should my child my innocent child suffer? Add his ten stripes to mine. Give me sixty, seventy, eighty, as many as you like, but do not flog my boy before my eyes—the eyes of his own father. It will kill him, sire, he is so weak.'" He might as well have prayed to the stones with which the streets were paved, for all the heed the Mamlatdar took of his entreaties. The Havaladar, with a slap on his face, told him to be quiet. Poor Pirya cried loudly for

mercy—and Heaven and Earth responded to his cries but no response was there from the cruel butcher.

A large crowd had gathered to witness the prisoners being flogged, but they fell away, one by one unable to look on at the awful spectacle, until only the policemen and a few—a very few—as heartless as they, remained.

The excuse generally given by executive officers for the perpetration of such deeds is, that harsh measures are necessary to over-awe wrong-doers. Very true, but why punish the innocent?

Cut after cut descended upon the boy's bare back, and by the time the ten strokes had been administered, it was one bleeding mass of flesh from neck to waist. Canes and not the old cat o' nine tails were used, a circumstance which the police seemed much to regret. The boy was half dead. At the first cry of anguish which

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escaped his lips the poor father fell down as if struck by lightning. Fainter and fainter grew the boy's wails as each successive cut weakened his wasted frame further. Ramji dared not open his eyes for fear of the sight that should meet them. How he longed to strangle those inhuman wretches; but that was impossible. He was quite helpless. He had not strength enough to lift his own hand, how could he then chastise those butchers? At last the horrible scene came to an end. The boy was unbound, and orders were given for his removal to hospital. Ramji's turn came next. "What a rogue the fellow is" remarked one of his tormentors, "he wants to make us believe he has fainted. Oh yes my boy, a strong dose from the cane will soon bring you round." He was then lifted up and tied to the post which was perhaps to be his bier.

And then the Mang (executioner) began his merciless work. Even those who were hard hearted enough to stand there and look on the horrible sight expected every cut as it descended to put an end to his life. But Ramji uttered not a word. No cry for mercy burst from his lips. Silently he endured the bodily pain which was being inflicted on him. What little blood remained in his attenuated frame was drawn out and with it pieces of his skin. His back looked as if it had been branded with red hot iron, while bits of flesh hung out leaving the bones bare in some places. No officer, however, allowed any feelings of humanity to interfere with him, in his faithful discharge of his duty, and the fifty cuts were duly administered. But though Ramji's lips were silent, his eyes showed the anguish he was undergoing. After the fifth cut he was

unable to leave his eyes open and then, as stroke succeeded stroke he opened them only to let fall the drops of anguish which had gathered there. By the time the villainous deed perpetrated under the name of justice was ended, his eyes had lost all their lustre and looked lifeless. Orders were then issued that he should be taken to the hospital, and the others were called up to undergo the same horrible torture.

But we shall follow Ramji, gentle reader, though not much remains to be told about him. He did not survive the flogging even half an hour. When he reached the hospital, to his unspeakable joy he was laid on a cot next to his son. He knew he had not many minutes to live, so turning his eyes in the direction where his child lay, he exerted all the little strength he had, to take a last look at his boy. Once only did he look at

the prostrate form and muttered some thing to himself the names, perhaps, of his sons Hirya and Pirya, then he closed his eyes for ever. He remembered his wife, and the remembrance increased his mental anguish until it more than equalled his bodily pain. The death hue stole over his face. A fit of shivering came over him. He tried to open his eyes, but it was in vain. With his mind's eye, however, he saw all his loved ones once more. The wife and children he had left behind, the cattle he had sold, Hirya's mangled body, and Pirya's blood covered form all these he saw in his imagination. A moment more and Ramji had breathed his last. Pirya did not survive his father even an hour.

CHAPTER III

WHEN her husband and sons were no longer visible, Jayabai turned her feeble steps in the direction of her hut. The load at her heart was heavy indeed, but she could not weep now; the fountain of her tears seemed dried up. Two handfuls of bajri and a little flour constituted their whole stock of provisions. Jayabai, however, was not in the mood to think either of grain or flour. Her mind was full of her husband and her two sons. "How far could they have gone by this time? Would they get anything to eat on the way? When would they reach the town? And once there would they get any work?"

What would become of her boys? These and such questions occupied her mind and made her anxious and sad. She could think of nothing but her absent ones. Hunger and thirst were banished. If she had only herself to think of she would never have stirred from the place where she was sitting, but she had five children to care for. And this thought brought her to herself. The baby was crying out, while the other four were clamouring for bread. This roused her to exert herself and going to the dera (earthen pot) she took out a handful of juari, ground it and made two small cakes with which she silenced the children. There was now only one handful of grain left for the morrow. She had not touched any food that day. If she were to satisfy her own craving for bread, what would her children do the next day? Just then she recollected that she had put away

a stale piece of bread near the stove. She ate that and tried to make herself believe she had had enough. Telling the children not to stir out of the hut, she took the baby in her arms and went out to see if she could not earn a little corn. She went from house to house; but nobody gave her either work or corn. Sorely disappointed, she turned her steps towards the Inamdar's house. But the Inamdar caught sight of her while she was yet a good way from the house and told her to take herself off—and when she appealed to him to have pity on the child at least, if not on her, he turned round on her angrily exclaiming ‘Put the child into the fire, you hag, if you cannot feed it.’ ‘My lord,’ observed the woman, quietly, nothing daunted by his harsh words and manner, “recollect that you have children of your own. The Inamdar's wife, who was standing

inside, heard her husband's cruel words as well as the calm reply of the woman and her eyes filled with tears. But what could *she* do? Her husband ruled the house and she had very little liberty of action. But she could not bear the thought of the woman's being turned away from her door in that way. She stepped to the back of the house, and calling one of the servants, told him to give the woman a handful or two of *juari*.

When the servant offered her the corn Jayabai drew back unconsciously. Had it come to this, that she, who had dispensed charity so often, was to become a recipient of it? Her first impulse was to refuse the corn, to fly away from the alms that had come out of the house of the man who had told her to throw her darling into the fire. But she remembered the many hungry mouths at home, and pocketing her pride, stretched the

padar of her sari for the grain, hanging her head the while and shedding bitter tears. Then showering blessings on the head of her benefactor, she returned home with a comparatively light heart.

As she neared the hut, she heard sounds of an uproar. She quickened her steps but what was her surprise on reaching the house to find that her eldest daughter (aged eight) was nowhere to be seen, while the boy who was next to her in age, was lying on the bed, or rather the rags which served for a bed, groaning as if in great pain. The two younger children were sitting on the floor crying themselves hoarse. She called out loudly to her daughter, who crept to her mother's side from a corner where she had evidently been hiding herself, "What is the matter?" asked Jayabai, but no answer could she get from the trembling girl. After questioning her

again and again, however, she at last learned what had happened.

The children, it seems, had waited and waited for their mother and growing weary had wandered out of the hut. After a time, the tempting red fruit of the prickly pear attracted the eldest girl's attention, and she ran to pluck it. Her younger brother naturally followed her, but in doing so, fell down among the bushes and in an instant his body, which was now bristling with thorns, was covered with blood. A thorn pricked one of his eyes. The more he struggled to extricate himself, the more he was hurt. Then something bit him and he roared out with the pain. The poor girl was frightened out of her wits and did not know what to do. Fortunately a man going along the footpath near the hut, heard the children's cries and ran to their help. The boy was raised up gently,

and carried to the hut and laid on the quilt. The poor sister sat down by her brother's side and did her best to pull out the thorns but this caused the boy much pain and he wailed out piteously. When the footsteps of the returning mother were heard, the girl got frightened and thinking her mother would punish her severely, went and hid herself in a dark corner.

Sick at heart Jayabai looked about her helplessly. Would her misfortunes never end?

As has already been mentioned, there was neither lamp nor match box in the house. How then, was she to ascertain the state of her boy? She thought of going to the bania and begging for a pal'ful (spoonful) of oil. But would he be generous enough to give it? Hardly, she thought. Yet the mother's heart within her made her make the at-

tempt But alas, she got only rebuffs and insults for her trouble.

"Has your father kept a store of oil for you here, asked the Shylock, and then followed a shower of abuse.

When Jayabai got back she sat down beside the boy trying to extract as many thorns as she could in the dark and soothing him to sleep by her gentle words Her efforts were all in vain. The boy had been bitten by a venomous reptile Towards midnight, his hands and feet began to grow cold, and long before the day broke he had passed away

The poor mother's grief knew no bounds Only the previous day she had parted from her husband and two sons, perhaps never again to meet in this world And to day cruel death had snatched her child from her very arms. It was a mercy the boy died when it was dark. It saved her the misery of witnessing

his last struggles. At the last moment the boy had uttered a piercing shriek. He then caught hold of his mother's hand tightly, as if she could save him, and breathed his last.

It was morning. The east glowed brightly and made the ghastly corpse of her boy visible to Jayabai. She had no doubt now that he had been bitten by a snake. Oh, what bitter tears she shed over that still, discoloured form. But of what use were tears? They would not help her to dispose of the dead body of her child. How was he to be burnt? She had not a pie, and how was she to buy the necessary materials for cremation? All her neighbours had gone away long before. Who was there to help her out of her difficulty? She went again to the village, and recounting her story to the Patel, asked his assistance. He was sorry, he said,

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he could not help her, and she had to return home in despair and grief.

When she entered the hut, she found that the corpse was a horrible sight to look at. She racked her brains to find some way out of the difficulty. Frightened at the sight of the dead body, the children shrieked and cried, and then ran away. "Leave the corpse just where it was and walk away" that seemed to be the only course open to her. But could she do such a thing? She would have to. Her sari was a mass of rents and patches, and wholly insufficient to cover her own body; but she would not leave the hut without covering the dead body of her son. So she tore off a large piece from her own garment and made a shroud of it, then, before leaving the hut with her four children, she uncovered the face once more and imprinted passionate kisses on

the lips the cheeks and the forehead
of her dead boy

To be obliged to leave the corpse
of one's own child O God, thou
only knowest what that mother must
have felt Jayabai stopped a moment
at the door and looked in, then,
turning round, she made straight for
the footpath leading from the hut.
No question troubled her as to where
she was to go and what she was to
do After going a few yards, she
stopped and looked back. The door
of the hut was wide open. 'What
if a dog or a fox were to enter the hut
and tear the body of her child limb
from limb? This thought made
her turn back Telling her children
to stand outside, she went in, and
once more removing the cloth which
covered the dead face rained kisses
on the cold lips. As she sat beside
the lifeless form groan upon groan
burst from her lips, evincing the deep

anguish she felt. At last, tearing herself from the beloved object, she went out and fastened the door securely on the outside. Poor woman! She thought that now, at least no harm would befall her dead.

Once more she started, and this time successfully resisted every impulse to turn back. She covered as great a distance as she could that night. Innumerable hardships came in her way but she faced them bravely. Through the kindness of two men she was able to procure a little milk for her infant which quieted it for a while. But only for a while; because soon the pangs of hunger came on, and it sucked and sucked its mother's breast, making frantic efforts to draw out the nourishment which she was unable to give. The other children, too, now began to trouble her. They were too tired to walk To quiet

them she carried each one in turn on her back. But that did not prevent their being tired, and soon they raised the cry of hunger. She herself, as the reader knows, had had hardly a mouthful during the last three or four days yet she dragged along her weary limbs burdened as they were with the weight of two children. Soon the mid day sun poured its pitiless rays down on her. A feeling of drowsiness came over her and she fell fainting to the ground; but, like the true mother she was, she first removed her babe from the side on which she knew she was going to fall to the other.

Long she lay there in that swoon with her infant clasped to her bosom. After a while Nature brought her to herself. Perhaps God's time to free her once for all from all her miseries had not yet arrived. She had come to her senses only to find that all her

strength was gone. She knew however, that it was not safe for her to be there. So she crawled up to where a widespreading babul tree stood. Its cool shade after the broiling sun was refreshing indeed, but it could not give her back her strength, and there was not a person there to witness her suffering and render assistance. Her children lay on the ground beside her uttering always the one monosyllable, "Bread bread!" The eldest daughter had slipped away unnoticed to see if she could not get a little food for her mother by begging. The remaining three kept calling out to their mother, asking piteously for bread and crying as if their little hearts would break. "Oh, if a merciful God would only take us all away now, what misery we should be spared!" thought Jayabai. But no such good fortune was to be hers. She was to live

to see yet another child of hers die a horrible death.

One of the children had seen their mother plucking and eating some babul leaves the previous day, and despairing of satisfying his craving for food in any other way, he determined to follow her example. The moment Jayibai saw the boy climbing the tree, she put forth all her strength and tried to prevent him. But even that little exertion was too much for her, and she fell back fainting, giving a piercing shriek as she did so. The boy, terrified at the shriek, lost his hold, fell down head foremost on a huge stone and was dashed to pieces. When the unfortunate mother regained consciousness, she looked about her. But what words can paint her horror when her eyes alighted on the ghastly sight. Her own child! and she unable even to crawl up to him! O mothers, you

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alone can fathom the depth of this mother's anguish

Gentle reader, it is beyond the power of my pen to depict the history of this hapless family to its terrible end. The details are too revolting. I can only tell you this. The next day the lifeless forms of Jayabai and her babe lay under that very tree. Two vultures were fighting with each other over her body. Another was pecking at the dead baby, trying to see if it could not get even a little flesh to satisfy its hunger. The third child, though not yet dead, was on the point of being killed by the powerful beak of another vulture.

FINIS.

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